

Summary Minutes

Alexandria Waterfront Committee Meeting January 13, 2009

Members: Engin Artemel
Jay Atkinson
Christine Bernstein
Henry Brooks
Mel Fortney
Mike Geissinger
Doug Gosnell
Linda Hafer
Nathan Macek
Peter Pennington
Pete Petersen
Susan Pettey
Robert Taylor

City Staff: Andrea Barlow, Planning & Zoning (P&Z)
Kathleen Beeton, P&Z
Roger Blakeley, Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA)
Lt. Dianne Gittens, Police Department
Faroll Hamer, P&Z
Jim Hixon, RPCA
Cptn. Tammy Hooper, Police Department
Karl Moritz, P&Z
Laura Seidler, RPCA

Guests: Brian V. Buzzell
Susan Cohen
Linda Contura
Bert Ely
Charlotte Hall
Harry Harrington
Paul Hertel
Joanne Platt
Douglas Thurman
Van Van Fleet

Welcome and introductions

Committee members and guests introduced themselves.

Approval of minutes from the December meeting

It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of the December meeting.

Update on security at Marina

Gosnell reported that as part of City budget cuts, marina security had been eliminated and the installation of gates on each pier has been postponed. At the December meeting, Gosnell offered to speak with the City directly to discuss reinstituting marina security or installing gates, and he had since met with the City Manager and Deputy City Manager. He stated that they appreciated the position that installation of the gates could reduce the need for security patrols, and could secure areas that could create liabilities such as the north pier where people could trespass on boats or fall in the water. They discussed the issue of the City's liability for incidents since it is the marina's landlord. Incidents that boat owners have experienced range from missing flags or other appurtenances to an incident in which one boat owner was on board his watercraft as an intruder was trying to board. He added that marina leases include a clause regarding security.

Gosnell said they responded that cost is the main issue, however, with the estimated price of the gates having grown to \$100,000. They agreed to meet with the designer and determine if there's any way the design could be adjusted to cut the price to the \$30,000 range, perhaps by using more wood, eliminating backlights, using a less-costly electronic lock, or changing other features. They also noted that the waterfront planning process may lead a new look at the waterfront that could lead to replacement of the gates.

Blakeley noted that the existing design of the gates had already received approval from the Board of Architectural Review, and he would like to avoid resubmitting a new design for approval. RPCA staff have discussed with the manufacturer whether a similar look and level of security could be accomplished at a lower price. If a lower-cost design isn't available from the proposed manufacturer, then RPCA would revisit its design, but this could increase the time required to complete the project.

Gittens noted that the Police Department had not noted any increase in incidents since the security patrols ended. Blakeley stated that the area would not likely see an increase in incidents until warmer weather.

Discussion of City budget

Blakeley reported that the City Manager would present his proposed budget for FY 2010 to City Council on February 10. He said that one could infer that mid-year cuts made in FY09 would likely be maintained in FY10, with a lower overall City budget planned for FY10 given the economic downturn. FY09 budget reductions had already been posted to the City's web site. He suggested that the Committee may seek to determine its budget priorities, review the City Manager's budget after it is released and present its comments to the City Manager and to the City Council at its scheduled public hearing regarding the budget. Issues of interest to the Committee may include the degree of funding for marina gates, electricity, and general maintenance.

In response to a question regarding the number of returning lessees, Seidler noted that contracts for pleasure boat slips are due April 1, 2009, although RPCA is encouraging earlier responses. Ten traditionally transient slips have been converted to annual lease slips, and notices have been sent to 35 individuals on the wait list, but only four slips have been filled. This is in contrast to the significant demand for open slips from waitlisted boaters in previous years. Seidler noted that the City tries to cover the direct operating costs of the marina, while capital costs are generally covered by the General Fund.

Brooks stated that the marina should cover its costs, and the Parks and Recreation Committee would like guidance from RPCA on what slip fees should be to cover marina costs, including security. He stated that the marina should not be a money-losing proposition for the City and should cover its direct and indirect costs.

Blakeley noted that RPCA annually does a market study to determine pricing relative to other area marinas. RPCA submits its recommendation to the City's Office of Management and Budget, which then submits a proposal for approval by City Council. The survey usually occurs during the summer, and approval for lease fees occurs during fall in time for lease renewal notices over the winter.

Blakeley noted that the waterfront and marina cost centers have merged. Jim Hixon would serve as dockmaster as well as manager for all waterfront parks.

Gosnell stated that his subcommittee (whose members include Atkinson and Artemel) likely would not have a recommendation regarding establishment of an enterprise fund for the marina until midyear. The subcommittee would need to examine what expenses (mainly capital) should be covered by marina fees and what larger capital items should be covered by the City's capital improvement program. He noted that dredging is the largest cost.

The Committee resolved to discuss this issue again at its February meeting, after the City Manager's budget had been released.

Update on Waterfront Planning Process

Hamer continued the discussion with the Committee begun last meeting regarding the waterfront planning process. An item on the Council docket that evening outlined the proposed process for waterfront planning, a map of planning boundaries, a summary of findings from the stakeholder interviews conducted by Kramer and Associates, and staff's proposed goals for the planning process, which would be presented to the Planning Commission and Council for comment. She said it would be helpful to get the Waterfront Committee's take on the proposed planning process goals. She said she would summarize the Committee's feedback in her oral presentation to Council that evening.

Members offered their comments on the proposed map:

- Brooks stated he liked the map because it clearly defined the limits of the waterfront planning process. He asked whether there could be a map outlining public and private lands, to differentiate specific parcels. Hamer responded that this plan would have less to do with land use and zoning. The broader issues would be how plan waterfront activities, how to apply public lands, and the cost-benefit for proposed activities. She said there were only two major parcels subject to redevelopment on the waterfront, Robinson Terminal's North and South parcels.
- Pettey asked whether the map's boundaries should include the WMATA bus barn, since there were potential opportunities to move uses presently on the waterfront to other locations (such as the WMATA parcel), which could be examined as part of the waterfront planning process. Hamer responded that the original boundaries were larger than as mapped for presentation to Council to focus in the study. That would not preclude looking at uses outside the boundaries of this plan.
- Pennington asked whether proposed redevelopment of Robinson North should prompt consideration of enlarging the map's boundaries to include more of the surrounding neighborhood.
- Artemel said that he thought the boundaries in the vicinity of Robinson Terminal were fine, but suggested enlarging the boundary along Lower King Street west to Fairfax Street to encompass the gateway to the waterfront.
- Fortney suggested including Hunting Towers and Porto Vecchio within the waterfront planning boundaries.

Hamer said that the proposed goals for the waterfront planning process were shaped based on Kramer's' stakeholder interviews and existing comprehensive plans and other City documents and planning processes.

Members offered their comments on the proposed goals:

- Fortney stated that it was difficult to do development in Alexandria with all of the historic preservation requirements. He asked why elements of the City that are not subject to change, such as parcels along King Street or National Park Service property, should be included in the study. Hamer responded that just because an area is included in a plan doesn't mean something is going to be done, but that a change is proposed. Pennington added that the planning process was not just about changing buildings, but also creating pedestrian connectivity, managing traffic, and examining other issues.
- Gosnell said that the plan should look at ways to manage waterfront management costs, including litter control and dredging. He added that the waterfront should draw residents and visitors, and added that the

proposed goals should be edited to state that the waterfront should not just “attract,” but draw-in or “captivate” the public.

- Atkinson noted that a historical, working waterfront was a rough and tumble place with dirty and unattractive uses. He asked what was really meant when the goals states that the plan should be authentic. Hamer responded that authenticity includes the history of the people and the City’s eras in addition to the actual building structures. She said that Alexandria is not “Disney” historic, it is the real thing.
- Bernstein stated that between the proposed “inclusive” and “variety” goals, the current wording might be construed to include new athletic facilities along the waterfront, or other new uses in City parks. Hamer stated that the idea is that the waterfront should take advantage of activities and facilities that are unique to a waterfront location. Artemel added that the proposed “compatibility” goal stated that the waterfront plan should respect existing residential neighborhoods, which includes parks.
- Gosnell stated that the “compatible” goal should tie back to being authentic. He said that it ended a little abruptly as currently written.
- Pennington asked which is more important: Being attractive to Alexandrians or serving visitors? Hamer responded that the City would never achieve agreement on this at the conceptual level. She said it was a balance, that the City could do both, but the details for achieving that balance must be discussed as part of the planning process.
- Macek commended that the goals should explicitly state that the plan would be consistent with existing plans that are a legacy input to this planning process.
- Geissinger asked whether the “permeable” goal at the bottom could serve as a preamble at the top of the list of goals. He said it was very important to have waterfront development that is attractive from the water that puts boating and boating interests at the same level as parking and land use interests. Hamer said her goal was not to alter the goals that would be presented to Council that night, but she would relay the Committee’s comments orally to Council.
- Brooks stated that he agreed that the waterfront has to be attractive from the river. Artemel added that the perspective from the waterfront was very important, that without a waterfront planning process, those needs are not considered. He asked whether there should be an additional goal to study waterways.
- Geissinger asked whether the planning process could attempt to solve the issue of motor coaches in Alexandria by examining ways to use the waterfront to ferry visitors to the City. He also suggested using the plan to identify economic development opportunities along the waterfront.

- Artemel stated that a lot of people don't realize how the waterfront used to be. He said it would be useful to include a preamble to the plan that specifies the history of the waterfront, which notes the land uses that existed on the waterfront previously.
- Hafer said that there is a lot of interesting variety along the waterfront. She said that she hoped that development would not turn the waterfront into copycat "Disney" townhomes. She said she would like to keep the picture of our industrial past but incorporate it in a constructive way at such locations as the Robinson Terminal site.
- Fortney suggested that the plan include opportunities for economic development by private entities. There was discussion regarding the City and developer roles in redevelopment of the Robison Terminal North site.
- Bernstein inquired regarding the Kramer interviews and asked whether a representative of Founder's Park had been contacted. Beeton said she would investigate.

Guests offered their comments on the proposed goals:

- One guest stated that item B of the P&Z memo to Council regarding the waterfront planning process stated that Kramer had approached 64 stakeholders. He stated that no one had approached the Old Dominion Boat Club, which owns property at 1 and 2 King Street. He noted that the club had been in discussion with the City since 2005, but that hasn't changed the club's interest in working with the City. Beeton responded that she believed that the club was contacted, but would follow up.
- One guest said he took it as a personal affront that the message coming out of the stakeholder interviews was that City officials must exert strong leadership in the planning process. He said it was an attempt to marginalize the citizens out of the process. He said that the City was trying to tell the public that the people who have the greatest interest in the waterfront should be excluded. Hamer said that there should be significant and meaningful public involvement in the process, and the attempt was not to exclude anyone.
- One guest commented that the wording from the Kramer stakeholder interview findings about not letting a "few people" control the planning process marginalized those who have had a strong role and paid the cost of living and maintaining properties in Old Town. Hamer responded that the Federation of Civic Organizations had strongly expressed that an advisory committee should not be established. She said that she didn't see how the process could involve the public any better.
- One guest commented that he thought the docket item was a pretty good packet. He said he had spent three hours with Kramer and provided input. He said he wanted to echo Macek's earlier comment that the process should be consistent with previous plans, such as the plan for Windmill Hill

Park. He said this document should include a firm start-stop date and exclude the word “endeavor,” letting Council add back the “fluffy” words regarding deadlines. Hamer responded that at different places along the waterfront, such as Windmill Hill, she would like existing plans to be presented to the public. She noted that a lot of groups such as civic associations have done their own waterfront plans, and said there would be opportunities for those plans to be laid out for the rest of the stakeholders.

- One guest commented that the Art Commission was working on a Waterfront Plan and would like its efforts to be incorporated into the planning process.

Following Hamer’s presentation and discussion, the Waterfront Committee discussed its role in the planning process. Artemel noted that the waterfront process would function as an open process as outlined by Hamer, and asked what role the Waterfront Committee was going to play. He asked whether the Committee would sit back as the planners approach the Committee on an as-needed basis, have an active role, or a review role? He said the Committee needed to convey that role to Hamer.

Pettey stated that at a minimum, it’s incumbent on the Committee to have a consistent representative or two at the public meetings. She said Hamer had not been clear on when she would come before the Committee again. Artemel responded that a P&Z representative should report back to the Committee at every meeting. Blakeley confirmed that Hamer would send a representative every month to report back to the Committee.

Pennington stated that the Waterfront Committee reports to the Mayor, so if there’s something the Committee wants to raise, it can. Artemel responded that that was the idea, that the Committee needed the information so that it could report to the Mayor.

Brooks stated that the Waterfront Committee members represent other groups and they should report what they learn from this process back to their groups.

Bernstein stated that it would have been helpful to have an overview of EDAW, the consultant hired to lead the planning process. Artemel said he would like an introduction to EDAW’s work and requested that they present to the Committee.

Blakeley said that EDAW’s scope is unchanged from what the Waterfront Committee reviewed, and he could arrange to have them come to a meeting. He said that the Committee needed to be sure it gives staff sufficient notice when it wants to include outside presentations on the agenda.

Petty added that the Committee needs to be clear in expressing its desires, by not only discussing issues but also expressing an opinion or acting on the discussion.

Announcements

Hall announced that Potomac Riverboat Company would be providing transportation from Alexandria to Washington's Southwest waterfront on Inauguration Day, January 20, 2009. Boats would begin running at 6:00 a.m., with the last one to the District leaving at 9:15 a.m. Alexandria law enforcement and Coast Guard officers would provide security at the docks. The river is scheduled to close at 10:00 a.m. and reopen at 6:00 p.m., after the President is in his residence. There would be 40 Coast Guard vessels in the vicinity of Alexandria patrolling the Potomac, with some as large as 200 feet immediately south of Hains Point. She said the Coast Guard would be walking the City waterfront and had right to come on Potomac Riverboat Company and other vessels at any time, day or night. Many of the Coast Guard officers would stay at the Westin National Harbor Hotel. On Inauguration Day, Coast Guard officers would ride Potomac Riverboat Company vessels and would escort its boats. She said that the Company was very excited at the opportunity and hoped to carry as many as 3,200 passengers on seven boats.

Petty stated that the water taxi was great news in a grim transportation situation, and an exciting way to get people thinking of the river as an efficient thoroughfare. Hall stated that her company had been working with nearby parking garages and lot operators to make sure they're open early to serve people that morning. Security would be the same as TSA at the airport—very thorough and intense. Hall stated that there would be curfews on the river, so certain activities on the river would need to cease after specified hours.

Gosnell stated that RPCA needed to get the message out to slipholders that the river would be completely closed. Seidler stated that she would send an announcement to slipholders.

In response to a question from Macek, Hall stated that the Washington Nationals and the District were in discussions with each other regarding construction of a dock near Nationals Park. A dock is the only holdup for water taxi service from Alexandria to the ballpark.

Pennington announced that the Environmental Policy Commission was now working on Phase II of its Environmental Action Plan. Instead of examining general issues such as air or water, Phase II would consider specific issues, such as climate change (with an estimated change in sea level of five feet anticipated by the end of the century) and development of green businesses.

Adjournment

The Committee adjourned at 9:20 a.m.